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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/05/2018

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON SAUDI INTERFAITH DIALOGUE STATEMENT

REF: STATE 117019

Classified By: Ambassador Alejandro Wolff for reasons 1.4(B) and (D)

¶1. (SBU) Post met with the Saudi Mission to discuss changes to the Saudi draft statement about the interfaith religious dialogue that will to be discussed during the General Assembly (GA) plenary on November 12-13 (reftel). The resulting text, which incorporates virtually all of the USG changes, and particularly every USG substantive change, is included in paragraph 6.

¶2. (C) This statement would not be an official document or outcome of the November 12-13 plenary meeting. The Saudi Mission is hoping to have it issued by a high-level UN official, and they have asked President of the General Assembly (PGA) Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann to issue it. The PGA reportedly does not want to issue the Saudi statement as it stands; he wants to edit it to make his own statement. Saudi FM Prince Saud arrives in NY on November 7 (with King Abdullah), and will meet with the PGA that afternoon. Dr. Rayed Krimly, Saudi special envoy for the interfaith dialogue, told Ambassador Wolff on November 6 that FM Saud will have a tough conversation with the PGA about the need to read the Saudi statement exactly as it is presented to him; otherwise the Saudis will ask the deputy Secretary General to issue it (they have already talked to the Secretary General's office about that). If that happens, the PGA will probably still make a statement of his own in which he is likely not to discuss interfaith dialogue, but rather hammer on his usual theme of shared ethical and moral values that must be used to address crises such as the current global financial crisis. Should that occur, it will be very clear that the PGA is making a personal statement.

¶3. (C) The Saudis have now shared the statement in paragraph 6 with other missions. The French, as EU president, have expressed strong concerns about some elements. As the statement is not something that would be agreed to by consensus or voted on by the GA members, it is not undergoing the standard negotiating process amongst member states. It would be, in essence, a personal statement by whichever UN official issues it. The French, however, are concerned that if it is read by the PGA at the end of the plenary, it will be perceived as being a statement on behalf of the General Assembly membership, no matter what its actual status.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Wolff and Krimly also discussed other options for publicizing the interfaith dialogue if the PGA proves recalcitrant. These include holding a joint press conference between FM Saud and the Deputy Secretary General (in the Secretary General's absence) at which the statement could be issued as a press statement by the Deputy Secretary General; and circulating the statement as a document of the General Assembly, which can be done at the request of any member for any document. Krimly seemed receptive to both these suggestions but noted he would have to consult with the FM and King when they arrive.

¶5. (C) Post will continue to work closely with the Saudi Mission on the statement or other options for drawing attention to the Saudi interfaith dialogue, keeping in mind the need to ensure a successful General Assembly plenary session that sets the right tone and is not hijacked by the PGA.

16. (SBU) Draft text incorporating USG suggestions as agreed to by the Saudi Mission:

At the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, the General Assembly convened a high-level meeting during its sixty-third session on 12 and 13 November 2008 under item 45 culture of peace.

The meeting reaffirmed the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The meeting further recalled that all States have pledged themselves under the Charter to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, including freedoms of religion and expression, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

The High-level meeting underlined the importance of promoting dialogue, understanding, and tolerance among human beings, as well as respect for all their diverse religions, cultures and beliefs. Participating States expressed concern about the increase in serious instances of intolerance, discrimination, hatred expressions, and harassment of minority religious communities of all faiths, as well as derision of religious symbols, and the mis-use of religions in actions of terrorism, violence and coercion, thus rejecting the use of religion to justify the killing of innocent people, which directly contradicts the commitment of all religions to peace, fraternity and love.

The high level Meeting of the General Assembly reiterated its call for the dissemination of a culture of tolerance and mutual understanding through dialogue, and for supporting the initiatives of religious leaders, civil society, and member states to deepen inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue.

The High-level meeting took note of the holding of the world conference on dialogue in Madrid between 16 and 18 July 2008 under the patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud, and King Juan Carlos I of Spain. The High-level meeting recognized that this initiative is the latest in a series of initiatives made by religious leaders, civil society, and member states seeking to entrench the culture of peace and understanding among the proponents of various faiths, cultures, and civilizations; and spread among all people a culture of respect for human rights and tolerance, as well as the recognition of the common humanity of us all.

Participants at the meeting acknowledged the process initiated in Madrid and encouraged its continuation. They appreciated what King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud mentioned in his address regarding establishment of a steering committee composed of representatives of all the religions and faiths represented in Madrid to continue the dialogue, and allocation of a trust fund to guarantee the autonomy of the dialogue process so it continues free from any political interference.

Member states expressed their commitment to strengthening and supporting existing mechanisms within the United Nations for promoting human rights, protecting the environment, spreading education, eradicating poverty, combating intolerance, and fighting drug abuse, crime and terrorism, utilizing the positive contribution of religions, faiths and moral humanitarian principles in these endeavors.

End text.

Khalilzad